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Creating and Producing a Major Stage Production

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Abstract

This paper shows how to prepare for, create, and produce a major production. An ESOL teacher will be able to use this paper as a blueprint to put on a major dramatic production with an advanced English class. Practice and enhancement of language skills are stressed, along with social and cultural awareness skills. The third part of the paper contains exercises, games, and techniques not only to promote the use of creative dramatics in the classroom, but also to suggest exercises which will prove as excellent preparations toward producing and creating a major stage production.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A language can be learned best through a variety of techniques used in combination. One very effective way of broadening and deepening language skills is through a major dramatic production.

Drama serves various purposes. The primary one is through use of the language to practice grammar and sentence structure; another is to enlarge and enrich vocabulary. The third, and perhaps most important, is that acting out a story has more relevance for the student than traditional classroom exercises. The student is exposed to the culture in a more meaningful way; and the language of feeling is more aptly addressed.

"People learn by being--being the people, things, places, animals and thoughts and feelings that they are studying. Learning or enhancing a language through which they may escape the typical classroom learning situation and procedures and learn by performing. Drama gives the learners opportunities to do some of the building of this knowledge for themselves."[1] Often no more is needed than one's own creativity and imagination.

I plan to list a variety of techniques--most of which can be used as stand-alone ways to practice and enhance

language or act as icebreakers as well as cultural subject matter.

Drama is people. People come in all sizes, shapes, abilities and interests. The purpose of this paper is to provide the ESOL teacher with the basic guidelines for a major dramatic production which can be changed, modified, and altered to fit the particular needs and circumstances of the class.

II. CREATING AND PRODUCING A MAJOR STAGE PRODUCTION

A. Background:

The first step is to learn about a wide range of different performance types and techniques, such as movies, T.V., plays, circuses, mime, and puppets even if you have already decided on which type suits your needs best. Ideally the group should be exposed to as many different types of performance as possible. There is an important difference in attending a production to do research rather than to be merely entertained.

Before attending, the group should discuss the nature of the production to be observed and what things they will be concentrating on. After the performance, the group should discuss what they've observed, paying particular attention to those things which seemed to work best and those things which didn't.[2]

B. Choosing the Play:

Although this paper focuses on plays and musicals, what follows should be helpful even if your group chooses some other alternative. The process of selecting your play or musical begins with a brainstorming session--probably of the three large categories of prescripted plays, adaptations of stories or books, or self-scripted plays. Using a

blackboard or large piece of paper assemble all of your and/or the class's ideas and limitations without criticism. Get as many ideas written down as you can, and then consider the following set of questions:

1. Who will be the audience? What to and how will they respond?
2. What acting skills, time, energy, and money do you have for rehearsing, memorizing lines, and performing?
3. What is needed for the technical aspects of the play; e.g., scenery, lighting, sound effects, costumes and props? Do you have the time, energy, technical talent and money?
4. Is the story scriptable, and easily modified?
5. If it's a published play:
   a. What are the copyright laws and costs?
   b. Can it be modified?
6. Is music involved? If so, what are your resources, e.g., a cappella singing, accompanied singing, records, tapes, live accompaniment?[3]

C. The Script:

There are several ways to obtain a script: a published play, a story or book adaptation, or a script written by the class. There are certain advantages to using published scripts. Although they can be expensive, published scripts

are easy to use and quickly implemented. Published scripts can be obtained through libraries, college dramatics departments, and some specialty bookstores. (The Drama Bookstore, 723 7th Avenue, New York, New York 10019.) A typical script costs about $3.00 per copy. Some older plays are in the public domain and may be photocopied from library sources or private collections.[4]

Despite the ease of using a published script, I recommend adapting a story or book, particularly those which are strongly part of the English language culture. A story with a strong plot line will prove easier than one with a lot of descriptive detail. You may find the device of using a narrator to fill in the details useful, but the more dialogue and action you can incorporate the more interesting your production will be.[5]

In producing the actual physical script, follow the formats of the published scripts. Note how stage directions are handled, how props are mentioned, and how acts and scenes are arranged. Use as much of this format as is applicable to your own situation, but use double spacing--for clarity and ease of modification. One page of double spaced typing equals approximately two minutes of run time.[6]

Even with young groups much is to be gained by having the students do the actual adaptation; such as experience in writing and using the language, and identifying more

closely with the final product. This can be done by having individuals or small groups writing different sections of the play or having a play writing contest!

The third way to obtain a script is to write it yourself! As subject matter, you will have to use the imagination and life experiences of the class, which can be fun and unforgettable. Keep in mind these six steps of plots format:

1. Introduction: The first thing the audience sees or hears will set the scene and the mood.
2. Initial Incident: The first important happening introduces characters and general tone.
3. Rising Action: The characters have been introduced and the action builds.
4. Climax: The high peak of action, the turning point.
5. Falling Action: The action tapers off.
6. Denouement: The ending.[8]

These same six steps also apply when adapting a story or book. They will help you in selecting which elements to bring into your script.

D. Casting:

"Casting" a play means the selection of the actors to play the parts. It is often an elaborate process of its own.

Done properly, casting can advance the knowledge and understanding of the play and be both stimulating and exciting. Remember to consider the actor's abilities, desires, need for positive encouragement, energy and commitment.[9,10]

The most common form of casting is the "tryout." Several students compete for a part and a selection is made from among them. Unfortunately, the competitive nature of the tryout often results in tension or not showing true abilities of the actors.[11]

Opening tryouts to whomever wishes to audition for each part works well, for all feel important and no one feels left out or slighted. Begin with a sign-up sheet with a listing of all the characters. Students may sign up for as many parts as interest them. After everyone has signed up, then start the actual tryouts. Choose scenes from the play which involve several actors relating to each other. Try several different combinations of candidates. This form of tryout not only lets you see how people work off of each other but also actually begins the rehearsal process!

During the tryouts minimize instructions to the actors. Use this time to observe how the actors naturally move on their own and on the stage, and how various people react to and relate to each other.[12]

The tryouts should be observed by the students not competing for the parts in question. Their input will be helpful;

they'll have a feeling of involvement, and also get practice at giving each other feedback and critical review. With adult groups the final selection responsibility may be shared with students or other production assistants.

Combining the tryout method with improvisation (to make up a story as one acts it out), is another way to cast a play. It tends to help relax unacquainted people, opens up the script for new interpretations and revisions, and forces the actors to concentrate on the sense of the action rather than the actual script.

The director begins with a brief summary of the play or story (possibly needing scripting), and a rather more detailed summary of each scene and the characters involved, or he or she gives a scene not specifically from the play but one with a similar problem or situation to it. The actors are then instructed to improvise.[13]

There are several ways to utilize those people who have no acting or speaking parts because of choice or unsuitability. There are many other responsibilities such as being script or program writers. They can be narrators or "pages" who periodically come out before particular scenes to explain the play or passages of time in some way. They can also serve as musicians (including handling the tape recorder, record players, etc.); ushers; wardrobe and costume directors; makeup; producers and assistant

directors; prompters; lighting, sets, and scenery directors; advertisers; and props specialists--in charge of getting the props and making sure the props are on stage when needed. Actors without speaking parts can also play non-speaking parts, e.g., the monkeys in "Wizard of Oz" or Indians in "Peter Pan." They can also play non-animate parts such as trees, rocks, furniture, and frames of buildings. The list is endless; everyone can have a part in the production of a play, and learn something from the experience.[14]

E. The Technical Aspects of the Stage Production:

The most important thing to remember is that a good show does not need an elaborate set. Simplicity is often the best answer. Bear in mind that it's the quality and accurate representation of your students which is the secret.[15]

THE PERFORMANCE AREA

The most obvious type of stage is the traditional raised platform which is enclosed on three sides with the fourth side open for the audience. If your play is more light-hearted or intimate, you may wish to consider other settings. A more versatile stage is some form of "theater in the round." Audience expectations are less rigorous and more forgiving. Much less scenery needs to be made and all scene changes, entrances, and exists are done in full view.

This type of staging can be done anywhere from a classroom or gymnasium to a lecture hall or outdoor ampitheater. It is important for the audience to have unobstructed sight lines. If you expect only a small group, then it's all right for audience and players to be on the same level. But if more than two rows of spectators is anticipated, it's best to have audience and actors on different levels. If the amount of space you need for performance is small, it can be done on a raised platform, surrounded by the audience on three sides, or on all four sides. However, if you need a larger space, some of the action will be obscured. In this case, consider seating the audience on bleachers above the stage, which is on ground level.

Whichever strategy you employ, bear in mind to seat the audience in such a way so as to allow the actors to come onto the stage from various directions through unobstructed routes. If prompting is going to be required, make sure that the prompter can be easily concealed. Above all, rehearse as much as you can in the actual performance space. It is best to have all your staging problems worked out before opening night![16,17]

SCENERY

Keep the scenery as simple as possible. Simple scenery is easier to make, cheaper, and is faster to change. The

more you can "suggest" a setting the better. An arch frame can suggest a doorway, or an entire house! Benches, tables, and chairs can suggest a wide range of furniture. If you don't have permanent access to the performance space consider attaching scenery to moveable blackboards or bulletin boards. Some of these devices can be flipped, giving you two sets for the work of one. Flats (which are canvas sheeting or muslin nailed or stapled to a wooden frame), although they take time, energy, and money, can be used to paint a scene.[18]

If you are less ambitious, ordinary cardboard is easily obtained, cheap, and quite serviceable. It can be easily modified by being painted and cut into interesting shapes. However unbraced cardboard has the tendency to flop. You can give it the needed support by nailing wood slats perpendicular to each other and stapling the cardboard to these slats. Paper, particularly newsprint, can be an acceptable substitute for cardboard. But paper tends to curl, especially in damp weather, so support will be needed unless the paper is tacked or taped to a surface. Paper and cardboard constructions can also be suspended from the ceiling to suggest a skyline, wide open spaces, forests, or fantasy environments.[19]

For more elaborate setting, paper mache is a fine material. It can be purchased in art supply stores, but it is also easily made. Mix wheat paste and water to the consistency of cream. Then take long, thin strips of newspaper,

soak them in the paste mixture, and apply them to the contoured frame. Contoured frames can be made from chicken wire, boxes, or other interesting shapes suggesting rocks, mountains, or whatever. The more layers of mache you apply, the more durable the object will be. For truly exotic shapes, the mache material can be used with unbleached muslin in place of or in combination with newspaper strips. Soak the whole sheet in the paste mixture and apply it to the contoured shape. Mache will usually take a day or two to dry before it is ready for painting.[20] Painting the scenery is fun and creative, but there are a few tricks to remember. Cardboard often has a preservative coating which will reject ordinary paints and paper mache will absorb paints designed for less porous surfaces. Therefore you will be best served by mixing your own. The secret is to use wall paper sizing or powdered glue with dry pigment and water. These are usually obtained in paint stores. Mix one pound of dry pigment and one pound of wall paper sizing or dry glue with enough water to make one-half gallon of mixture. For other surfaces tempra or poster paint is ideal. Simple water color painting kits are also cheap and effective. Indeed crayons and charcoal will serve just fine in some situations. If your lighting is at all sophisticated, you may run into a small reflectance problem. Light reflects more off of bright colors, sometimes creating a different

effect on stage from what was apparent during the painting session. Therefore, plain white might turn out to be too prominent, and you may wish to add a slight amount of pigment to white.[21,22]

The following list of tools and equipment should prove helpful. For scenery building, you may need a hammer, a saw (coping, rip, and crosscut), screwdrivers (standard and Phillips), pliers (adjustable and needlenosed), stapler (especially a staple gun), thumbtacks and carpet tacks, nails, and brads; tape (cloth, masking, cellophone and ducting); bellwire, brushes, rulers, scissors, twine and rope. Many of these items can be borrowed; but make sure that someone is charged with the responsibility of maintaining a list of what was borrowed from whom and for checking items off as they are returned. It is also a niceness to acknowledge lenders in your program, if you have one.[23] The more student involvement in the planning and making of the scenery, the better. Preplanning is essential. Go through each scene and brainstorm ideas, possibly even creating blueprints. These blueprints are also helpful in blocking scenes. Indeed, no scene has been fully blocked until the scenery is in place!

LIGHTING:[24,25]

Most productions brightly illuminate the stage and keep the audience in relative darkness. This heightens the effect

that something special is going on. You should make some attempt at lighting (however unsophisticated) in order to achieve this aura of specialness.

Border or strip lights are ideal, but usually are found only in theater settings. They are rows of lights bulbs concealed from the audience by a shield and hung either just below the lip of the stage as footlights or hung from the ceiling just behind the curtain.

Spotlights can be useful for special effects, although they can be distracting at other times. Some scenes play best in front of the curtain, e.g., while scenery changing is going on. This action can be highlighted by someone with a spotlight in front of the stage. Spotlights can be roving or fixed. A roving spotlight needs an operator and the operator needs rehearsal. A fixed spotlight is mounted on a pole or from the ceiling and shines only on one place. You will still need someone rehearsed as to when to turn it on and off, and your actors will also have to learn how to position themselves properly. The best location for a fixed spotlight is to crosslight the stage, that is if the actor is in a downstage right position the spotlight shines diagonally across from left to right.

Spotlights, floodlights, and their appropriate socketry can be purchased at most hardware and lighting stores. They run $1 to $2 and generally are around 150 watts. You can

even make your own spotlight with a #10 tin can and a light bulb; but heat will be a problem so make sure the can is adequately ventilated and the socket is porcelin based. If you must use extension cords, be advised that inquisitive toes will always find it out. Therefore, an extension cord must be taped to the floor with broad ducting tape along their entire length. Finally, you must consult with the building custodian or some other knowledgeable person to avoid blown fuses or violated fire regulations. There is also the option of using hand held portable flashlights. Some of them are quite powerful and trouble free. If you have absolutely no lighting resources, one or two standing lamps with tilted shades will do, but do something!

If you are working in an environment where dramatic productions are likely to become regular events, you may wish to install permanent lighting. Try these additional sources, which will also furnish catalogues if requested:

Grand Stage Lighting Company
9 W. Hubbard Street
Chicago, IL 60610

Theatre Production Service
52 W. 46th Street
New York, NY 10036

SOUND EFFECTS

Once you have identified a sound effect need, brainstorm the possibilities. Here are some simple ideas: Thunder (and explosions): breathe explosively into a microphone tuned to highest volume; breaking glass: small pieces of metal dropped into a wastebasket; rain: B.B.'s dropped onto a drum; telephone: hand-held bell or a bell and battery; horses or marching troops: backstage personnel galloping or marching in place. The human voice, especially amplified and distorted through a sound system, is capable of a wide range of sound effects. Explore and experiment.[26,27]

COSTUMES AND MAKEUP

Costumes are a very important part of any production. They add color, compensate for simple scenery and furnishings, suggest particular characters and settings, and help an actor "feel" the part. Costumes can be as simple or as elaborate as you choose. Almost anything can be a costume: bathrobes, capes, long skirts, "period" clothes, tights, sheets, large trash bags, bathing caps (to suggest baldness), towels, old hats, curtains, bedspreads, flour bags, yard, rope, costume jewelry, feathered boas and boots. If your resources are limited, even only hats make sufficient costumes. If time, money, or expertise is limited, then having each actor plan and make his/her own costume is often the best.[28]

Masks often liberate even the shyest of performers, and they always lend an air of specialness. Many masks can be found in the party supply sections of stores, and they can be best accumulated around Halloween. You can also make masks of your own from paper bags or other materials. If you've got the time, you can make quite elaborate masks from the gauze tape used in making casts for broken bones. Cover the actor's face with vaseline. Soak the gauze strips in water and lay then across the face and wait for them to dry. It works best if the actor can breathe through several straws while waiting. After the mask has been removed and allowed to dry even more, it can be painted. The gauze is available in some pharmacies and all hospital supply stores.[29]

Sophisticated makeup is a subject for experts and is worthy of a volume on its own. Makeup can be used in three different ways. As in the "real world," makeup can be used to accentuate features, i.e., large eyes or high cheekbones. Makeup can also be used to suggest a character, e.g., whiskers for animals. Makeup put on in bizarre patterns can suggest fantasy characters. Many stores stock serviceable makeup kits around Halloween. Some drug stores will even have theatrical makeup. If your environment supports a local theatrical company, they may assist you in locating a supply. They may even help you in its use. If your resources are

limited, simple tempra paint will do.. Charcoal and burnt cork are also traditional standbyes; but before you apply them, lay down a thin base of unscented cold cream, i.e., Abolene, or it will be difficult to remove.[30]

Viola Spolin suggests regular character makeup sessions. It will aid the actors in experimenting with their characterizations. It's much more relevant for an actor to apply her/his own makeup (possibly with some help) than it is to have it imposed. By using makeup a lot during rehearsals, it is more easily worn during the performance. Makeup is an extension of a character, not a creation of it. Sometimes it's not necessary at all.

PROPS

A prop is any portable item used in a play, usually hand-held. They are often very much a part of a setting and help to define character. Often one item can be used to suggest another, e.g., an actor holding some tree branches can suggest an entire forest! As with costumes, the more each actor is responsible for obtaining and using her/his own props, the easier the entire production will be. If you are using more than just a few props though, you will need a non-acting person to manage them, especially between rehearsals. Props should be introduced into rehearsals as soon as possible. Actors need as much time to familiarize

themselves with their props as their lines.[31,32]

F. Rehearsals:

The length of time you spend on a rehearsal depends to a large degree on the group. Inexperienced groups (in terms of both performance or language experience) should have less time and more supervision per setting. Start with shorter periods and work your way up. An ideal situation is one in which several scenes or situations can be rehearsed at the same time. Sometimes this will require additional people to run these sessions, i.e., the musical director can be working on a song or a dance while the director is working on a scene. Older groups may have some actors who can rehearse themselves without supervision. Multiple activity rehearsals limits the boredom or restlessness of actors not involved.[33]

The atmosphere during rehearsals should be as free from tension, anxiety, bad mood, and competition as possible. It should be full of excitement, inspiration, and anticipation. People come to rehearsals in all frames of mind, which makes the transition from their other lives to the stage space very important. Everyone needs positive reinforcement and lots of energy.[34]

Your role as director is critical in setting and maintaining a positive and creative atmosphere. Ask yourself again the following list of questions, especially when things

seem to be going poorly:

1. "Am I giving out enough energy?"
2. "Am I spending too much time on mechanics?"
3. "Do the actors need more time on improvisation?"
4. "Are rehearsals too drawn out?"
5. "Am I nagging the actors too much?"
6. "Am I attacking the actors?"
7. "Am I just being a traffic manager?"
8. "Am I over-anxious?"
9. "Am I asking too much at this time?"
10. "Am I too concerned with the audience and/or other people's criticisms and reactions?
11. "Do I need to take time out to reread the play to search for a different perspective or return to the original theme?"
12. "Am I trying to do too much? Who can help me?"[35]

The following list of pointers is for the director to help the actors develop an ease in being on stage:

1. Plan rehearsals to cover a long time span, i.e., think in terms of weeks, not days.
2. Use acting exercises and theater games during rehearsals. It will not be wasted time.
3. Do not allow the actors to take their lines homes too early.

4. Use non-directional blocking ("Working out the position of the actors within a scene.") whenever possible.
5. Create a tension free, pleasurable atmosphere.
6. Bring in costume pieces and props early on to assure ease and comfort during performance.
7. Schedule as many performances to as many different audiences in as many other places as possible. Through this, discussions can take place comparing performance, and staleness can be averted.
8. Be aware of actors growing stale and what to do about it. Keep things as flexible as possible. Stress relationships and involvement in the play before memorizing stage directions and lines. Include acting exercises and theater games throughout. Vary rehearsals and performances. Insist on jobs well done and trying as hard as one can. Discuss staleness with the individual actors.
9. Stress good maintenance of costumes and makeup. An actor worried about a costume that's falling apart on stage can really tighten up.
10. Every once in a while do a complete run-through of the play. Do this even between actual

performances. This will allow pointers to be continuously presented and enable the play to continue to flower as a whole. Continued feedback will prevent laziness and exaggerated feelings of perfection.

11. Schedule breaks and refreshments during rehearsals to freshen things up and keep energy flowing.

12. If an actor appears to be moving awkwardly or confined to a small stage space, they may be trying to remember exact stage directions instead of flowing with the play. Use a space-involvement exercise to correct this.

    What's Beyond? The actor walks across the stage as only a place to be walked through. The object is to show what room they came from and what room they're going to. An example would be a trip from bedroom to bathroom, showing actions related to both.[37]

13. If an actor tends to sit down or shift from foot to foot, they may not have a sense of place. Try this exercise:

    Where With Objects: The first actor comes on and arranges a set of objects to define a space, e.g., a supermarket, kitchen, or toy

store. The second actor enters and relates to "where" the first actor is.[38]

14. If someone is having difficulty with poor enunciation or rushing his/her speech, work on seeing the words as part of a whole dialogue rather than as individual words. Have them rehearse the lines in gibberish, or use some other relaxing idea. If the student is not fluent in the language, you might choose to ignore the whole problem since focusing on it may make it worse.

15. An actor who is an exhibitionist or "ham" is usually seeking some form of recognition (positive or negative) and often lacks self-identity. This problem takes a great deal of individual work and may not be easily solved. Somehow you've got to convince this person that by calling attention to themselves they end up disrupting the play. You might try using the traditional theater adage, "You look your best when you're trying to make everyone else look good."

16. If an actor is having trouble with a characterization, have the actor write the character's autobiography.

17. If an actor is having trouble touching or responding, he/she may have a fear of getting involved. The following exercises may help:

Contact: The object of the exercise is to make a new physical contact each time a new thought or phrase of dialogue is made. The two people doing the exercise cannot talk unless there is some form of touching. The touching should make sense in terms of the characters and the dialogue. Children will often resort to fighting or huddling as a way to avoid the exercise.

The dialogue need not be in words. It can be such things as laughing, singing, crying or coughing; just as long as it is accompanied by relevant touching. Spontaneity is important, so avoid programmed interactions. A useful "homework" assignment is to ask the actor to make the effort to find a five minute segment of their life in which they will touch another person while talking to them.

Give and Take: Two actors begin an improvisation. The other members of the cast call out the physical interactions which must take place.[39]

18. Voice projection takes a great deal of work, and inexperienced actors will have to be frequently reminded. The difficulty is that the act of reminding may disrupt the action on stage. You can adopt certain signals whenever an actor cannot be properly heard, e.g., raising your hand, cupping your ear, or calling out "What?" Other cast members should be involved in this type of feedback. The following exercises might help:

Calling Out: Create scenes between two groups of people who are trying to communicate with each other at a distance, e.g., tourists and guides who have become separated in a large cave; mountain climbers who have scaled peaks, and so on.

Whispering: Repeat the scene in whispers.[40]

19. Stage fright lessens with experience and exposure. Knowing what to do and how to do it helps a lot. Most stage fright is anxiety, pure and simple. It is often caused by shallow breathing; or, indeed, not breathing at all. Teach your students to breathe in slowly and deeply to a count of three, exhale slowly to a count of six.

20. Not listening to other actors or taking over scenes is something very important to work against. Everyone should be made aware of these unprofessional tricks: "Upstaging" is one of them: The actor stands in such a way so as to require the other actors to have their backs turned to the audience or be otherwise obstructed. Side coaching phrases such as "Share the stage" may be necessary. If the problem persists, you may try a combination of condemning the selfish behavior and praising harmonious behavior.

21. Inexperienced actors sometimes get so caught up in the action that they forget the audience. This is fine, but if often leads to them presenting their posterior extremities. One catch phrase which will get them pointed in the proper direction is, "Keep your pretty parts to the audience."

22. Try to keep the number of actors actively on stage to a maximum of four or five. Any more may lead to overcrowding and/or visual chaos.

23. Every so often "observe" a rehearsal with your own back to the stage. Lack of characterization

"acting" instead of feeling a character, weakness in relationships, and other things will often become more obvious.

The above list is primarily for the director. The list which follows is for both the director and the actors:

1. Mistakes, such as forgotten lines, are bound to happen. Inexperienced actors simply stop and flounder. Work at covering up in improvising solutions. Children often think that things have got to be done exactly right, they need to be told that the audience doesn't know the script and that if the action keeps going the audience won't even know a mistake has been made. Stress each actor's responsibility to the group as a whole.
2. Stress word patterns and meaning rather than word-by-word memorization. Prompters can be especially guilty of insistence on exact wording. Stress the fact that actors must listen to each other and observe what's actually going on rather than being totally dependent on their expectations.
3. Sense of timing must come from the actors, the situation, and the audience. It cannot be preplanned. If at all possible, try to have a

few guests at each rehearsal so that the students can accumulate experience with audience reactions.

4. Some moderate amount of laughter and fooling around can be tolerated in service of a relaxed atmosphere; but laughter is frequently a sign of nervousness. You may wish to explore what is it about the situation which is making the actor feel threatened. Often the reason is that the part is getting too close to a self-realization which may be new to the actor. At other times students may use horseplay to cover up their insecurities. Rather than ignoring or merely prohibiting this behavior, you may find it very profitable to use it as a topic for discussion.

5. When audiences react, e.g., with laughter, clapping, etc., you have to give them time before continuing. Audience reactions usually build to a peak and then taper off. Don't start until you sense the peak has just been passed. Since it may take the audience a moment or two to realize that the action has resumed, start with an action or nonsense word,e.g., "Ah!"

or "Well!" before picking up with the script.

6. Rules for backstage behavior must be group developed and then strictly observed. Anything which distracts from the action on stage is not to be allowed. There is a great temptation for people who are going to be backstage during the actual performance to want to spend all the rehearsals in front; however, it is equally important to rehearse backstage procedures. This also applies to the director!
7. Keep a personal written list of all your props, costumes, and special effects; where they will be when you need them; where they will be after you've finished using them. Get in the habit of checking off your list before every run-through.
8. Be aware of your body, especially your hands. You should try to cultivate a point-of-concentration, that is, what are you doing at each given moment? Perhaps you are involved with an object. Idle hands are distracting, they can be used to extend and develop character, e.g., twirling an evil moustache, fussing with imaginary lint, shaping definitive gestures.
9. When speaking in the direction of the audience, try for as much eye contact as possible. If eye contact is, for you, difficult or distracting,

look at people's "third eye," right in the middle of their forehead.

10. A play can develop a very "choppy" feeling if each actor always waits until the other actor's line is completely finished. This is especially the case if the first actor has forgotten part of his/her lines and the second waits around for the expected completion, which may or may not be forthcoming. If the action at all justifies it, try anticipating the start of your own line so that there is more of a flow to the conversation rather than a series of short bursts separated by silence.

11. In real life, the last few words of a sentence are usually the strongest. In a memorized part these last few words often trail off into inaudibility. Concentrate on accentuating the end of sentences.

12. If you <u>absolutely</u> need a certain cue to continue and your partner on stage isn't giving it to you, make it up yourself. Suppose you need: "Get out of here and take that dog with you!" You can always try, "I suppose the next thing, you'll be telling me is to get out of here and take that dog with me!"

13. If you've forgotten an important line and no one is about to save you, and you can't think of any creative improvisation; say "line" clearly and distinctly. That way you help your prompter.[41]

FEEDBACK

It is vitally important that the actors get feedback on the quality of their performance. I am going to focus on two types of feedback: "side coaching" and "review." Whatever style of feedback you use, keep it as positive as possible.

Side coaching is when the director comments to the stage action while that action is in progress without halting the flow of action. The comments should be clean and kept very brief, otherwise they may become disruptive and self-defeating; e.g., "Share the stage picture," "Hands!", "Faces!". This end will be best served if you develop your own list of, say, a dozen stock comments of which everyone is certain of the meaning. When you side coach without addressing your comments to a specific person, everyone on stage will incorporate it.

Review takes place at the end of a scene or a run through. Each member of the cast stands for review before director and peers and receives critical feedback.

There is a natural inclination to defend yourself when receiving negative critical review; and there is an equally

natural tendency to accept positive critical feedback with smiles or nods. The only appropriate response to a comment received in review is a simple, neutral, "thank you," so as not to program the reviewers. This often is very hard to learn.

You will have to decide for yourself how much peer review you are going to allow. Peer review is important, but sometimes it can get out of hand, especially where the maturity level of the reviewers is an issue. Usually the reviewers will copy the style of the director, so it is particularly important that you set the proper tone: a balance between correcting and improving and support.

The essential element of good critical review is commentary on observed behavior. Comments such as, "That was good" or "That was bad" do not convey meaningful information. Slightly better (but still lacking in precision) are "I like" comments, e.g., "I liked the way you answered the telephone." The actor may still not know what it was about the way in which they answered the telephone which you found likeable. The best type of review comment is one in which the reviewer shares his/her reaction to the piece, e.g., "When the phone rang I felt you were genuinely surprised. The pauses you used convinced me that you were actually listening to someone on the other end of the line."

If learning how to accept critical review is hard, learning how to offer it may be even harder; but this is a valuable experience for both director and cast. It forces the reviewers to come to grips with why they thought a particular piece was good or bad, or why they liked something or didn't like something else. It is exactly this self-analysis and sharing which makes critical review so important.

An actual time chart for the rehearsal schedule is very helpful for the director, technical staff, and actors. This time chart helps everyone to know what direction the rehearsals are going in and what purpose each activity has. Rehearsals fall more or less into three major divisions; warmup and groundwork, the meat of the matter, and "polishing." As always, the various activities and time allotments should be modified, added to, or dropped according to the needs of your situation.

FIRST REHEARSAL DIVISION: GROUNDWORK AND WARMUP

The overall purpose of this division is to acquaint cast and director to each other and everyone to the play. It may or may not include the selection of the play, the writing of the script, and the casting--all of which are discussed elsewhere.

1. Go over the story of the play in your own words. This is especially important for children and actors unfamiliar with the language. Describe the setting and the

major characters. This will help the actors to orient themselves to the plot, the stage locale, and the relationships.

2. Read the entire script from beginning to end. Discuss the story. This helps the actors to sense the play in its entirety.

3. Begin theater games and exercises as soon as possible, such as "gibberish" and "where." They will get you all used to working with each other.

4. Acquaint the cast with stage terminology. Post a list of characters and actors assigned to those parts. Also post the floor plan of the stage so that everyone can begin to familiarize themselves with the acting space and personnae.

Backstage

upstage right	upstage center	upstage left
stage right	center stage	stage left
downstage right	downstage center	downstage left

Audience[44]

5. Assemble the entire cast and read through the complete play with each actor taking her/his part. This should be a neutral reading, i.e., there is no attempt at characterization. Work out any errors in the script. Focus on unfamiliar words and words which may be difficult to pronounce. Have the actors underline their parts as you go along. This begins the familiarization with the script and is the first opportunity to develop comments, alterations, and feedback.

6. Do another sit-down complete read-through. Concentrate on the words--what they look like and what they mean. Visualize what the set will look like and the appearance of the characters (not the actors). This helps with understanding the dimension and meaning of the words and pictures as they relate to the ultimate staging.

7. Do the first walk-through. The actors will have scripts in hand and will be reading their parts as they walk through the action. Give them a general idea of what is going on, but be as non-directional as possible. The first walk-through is very time consuming, so plan on one act or less. Emphasize flexibility and creativity, changes are still easy and desirable. The first walk-through helps actors to become more aware of each other and the stage space.

8. Continue with acting exercises and theater games, especially those which concentrate on movement and dialogue. These will help the actors develop timing, character, pace, and total group action.

9. Discuss the walk-through. Decide on specific ideas to implement. This starts and strengthens the feedback and review process.

10. Repeat the cycle of walk-through using as many of the ideas which have come up as is possible. This will help build a sense of involvement and the appreciation of the play's unity will begin to develop.

11. Repeat the cycle of walk-through working on motivation in the blocking and clarifying relationships. The director continually stops the action to suggest movements and to ask questions. The questions should focus on why an actor is moving in a certain way.[45] Example:

"D (Director): Why did you go upstage?

A (Actors): Because you told me to.

D: Do you want the audience to know you were told?

A: No.

D: Why do you think you were directed to go upstage?

A: I went upstage to wait for Tom to enter.

D: Why couldn't you wait for him to enter where you were?

A: I'm not part of the scene at the moment. I have to get out of the scene without leaving the stage.

D: What can you be doing while you're waiting for Tom?

A: I guess I could be looking out of the window.

D: Why would you be looking out of the window?

A: To see if he's coming!"[46]

12. Begin the business of tending to business. Set a deadline for script memorization after which scripts will not be allowed on stage. Discuss lateness and absence. Emphasize that rehearsal behavior is focused behavior, not an opportunity for socialization. Begin discussions on costuming and makeup.[47]

13. Have another sitdown reading using the script as little as possible. Concentrate on cues: word cues and action cues. There are both internal and external action cues. An external action cue is something which another actor does which will trigger a reaction, either physical or verbal. An internal action cue is what's going on inside the actor in anticipation of a response. Action cues will help the actors to avoid the danger of becoming rigidly fixated on the script.[48]

14. Schedule a projection rehearsal, especially if you have several actors who cannot be easily heard. Rehearsing outside or with the director/audience seated very far away will help.[49] To help actors with breathing and emphasis, consider a running rehearsal, i.e., have them go over their

lines while running or while involved in some other strenuous exercise.

SECOND REHEARSAL DIVISION: THE MEAT OF THE MATTER

"This is the digging part." Blocking is mostly completed; lines and relationships are known and clear. The actor is ready to use his/her own creativity. The mechanics are largely over and done with. This is the time to build nuance and subtlety. It is also a time to resist major changes; unless, of course, there are compelling reasons to the contrary.[50]

1. More strict rehearsal discipline starts. While still maintaining a relaxed atmosphere, attitudes and behavior onstage, backstage, and in the "audience" are established and adhered to.

2. The director takes a more active role in characterization, using side coaching, "shadowing," games and exercises. Games and exercises are also useful in combating staleness, which now becomes an issue.

3. Begin "spot" rehearsals. A spot rehearsal concentrates on a single scene or part of a scene which is troublesome and needs special work. Spot rehearsals must, nonetheless, be integrated with the play as a whole.

4. Schedule at least one rehearsal in leotards, tights, or bathing suits. It will give you a better notion of "full

body action." It will also heighten the problems of any actors who are insecure about their bodies.

5. Schedule a "relaxed rehearsal." A relaxed rehearsal is one in which all the actors lie on the floor with their eyes closed, breathing very slowly and speaking their parts very quietly. The director goes around testing the degree of relaxation by lifting arms and legs and observing if they flop down when released (relaxed) versus floating down (tension).

The actors are advised to visualize the stage action from their relaxed positions. The director might then ask them questions about what they're seeing, what colors stand out, what they and the other actors look like. It may be necessary to remind them to listen to each other and not merely mouth their lines.

A relaxed rehearsal "removes anxieties and helps actors visualize the total stage movement and environment. Dialogue is shown as an integral part of the play.

6. Have a complete run through at least once a week, more often if possible. Start to wear different costume parts.[51]

7. Schedule improvisations both about the play and, seemingly, not about the play, e.g., "What's beyond?" "This helps strengthen individual characterization, group relationships, and group scenes and helps groups work in

agreement on stage scenes."[52]

8. Begin having the actors wear more and more of their costumes and begin using their props more often, especially the difficult ones. This "gives further clues on a way to show and 'be' a specific character."[53]

9. If you are experiencing characterization difficulties, have the actors write the autobiography of their character. If two actors are having troubles relating to each other in a scene, have them reverse roles for a while. This "helps actors see the play as a whole and to develop more insight into...character."[54]

THIRD REHEARSAL DIVISION--POLISHING

1. Now that most of the dramatic aspects of the production are moving along more or less of their own accord, more attention will have to be paid to the technical aspects. Lighting, scenery and backstage procedures should be worked out. This is the time to emphasize publicity. Assign people to make posters and to contact publications such as local newspapers, school newsletters, radio stations, and so on. If you are going to have a program, get it designed, printed, and people assigned to hand it out to the audience. Be sure to include acknowledgements. You may be able to pay for part of the costs by selling advertising space.

2. Reread the entire play! See if anything new has

cropped up. Continue spot rehearsals and run-throughs. Work on entrances and exits. Rehearse curtain calls.

3. Schedule a "special run through." A special run-through is one in which the cast receives no help from the director or prompters. If a mistake occurs, it must be covered onstage without interruption. If the mistake is not covered, or if an interruption occurs, the act or scene must be started all over from the beginning! "The group learns to function as a whole. Actors learn to help one another without attacking someone for making a mistake."

4. Hold a costume parade, to focus just on costumes. All the actors put on their complete costumes with makeup and lineup for inspection under the stage lights.

5. In the last week of rehearsal, all of your run throughs should be "technical." This should include all costumes, props, lighting, entrances, and exits, and curtain calls.

6. Hold the first dress rehearsal. This should be a non-stop run-through. If the director sees things which deserve comment, he/she should take notes rather than side coach or interrupt. You may experience a temptation to tinker with the play, but at this point changes should be made only with the greatest reluctance.

7. If it is possible hold several dress rehearsals as preview performances in front of selected and small

audiences. This is your last opportunity to practice responding to audience reactions.

By now the cast and director should be ready for the first public performance, confident that they can perform in front of an audience; ready to support one another; and able to convey an idea that is understood and accepted.[55]

G. The Performance:

"The performance brings the whole creative process of doing a play to its fruition; and the audience must be involved in this process."[56]

"Sharing with the audience is a very important idea to keep in mind. Don't work for a response from the audience or for 'personal gratification.' Share with each other--feel each others' rhythms and feelings."[57]

Have the actors on hand at least an hour before the actual performance to get on costumes and makeup, arrange props, sound effects, lighting and scenery. All staff should be at their respective places for the opening curtain at least one-half hour in advance. This is a good time for a final pep-talk, Ushers, equipped with programs, should also be ready at this time. YOu will not want to be interrupted by audience-related matters.

Along the way you should have acquired a backstage director, that is someone who will maintain order and direct

traffic. Preferably this will be a person who is not personally related to a member of the cast--as the backstage manager or he/she should be free from working out personality problems while attempting to keep order. If you, as director, have not rehearsed backstage, don't suddenly appear there on opening night. Indeed, it is suggested that you don't go backstage during the performance at all. There will be too much of a temptation to appeal to you for solutions to problems which the cast should work out on its own.[58]

If the cast is ready, they'll come through with flying colors. Keep in mind that mistakes don't ruin a life, or a play for that matter. If everyone has been trying as hard as they can, the performance will be highly rewarding, whatever happens.

Feedback review sessions are an important part of the rehearsal process, but after the first performance a feedback review is important. Although there should be one after each performance, it's after the first one that an actor's insights are most keen and fresh. Performing is a real learning experience that needs to be shared to be understood.

The language, group interaction, and basic acting skills learned along with experiencing an actual performance will be remembered far longer and with more impact than any set

piece of classwork. Acting in a language is not only living in that language, it is living in yourself in that language.

NOTES

[1]Natalie Bovee Hutson, Stage (Stevensville, Michigan: Educational Services, Inc., 1968), pp. 1-2.

[2]Charles R. Duke, Creative Dramatics and English Teaching (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1973), p. 145.

[3]Viola Spolin, Improvisation for the Theater (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1963), pp. 322-24.

[4]George Morgan Russmann, "Clowning Workshops," Brattleboro, Vermont, Fall 1980, Winter 1980-1981, Spring 1981, Summer 1981, Spring-Summer 1982.

[5]Hutson, pp. 52-56.

[6]Hutson, pp. 52-56.

[7]Hutson, p. 56.

[8]Hutson, p. 56.

[9]Spolin, p. 326.

[10]Hutson, p. 6.

[11]Spolin, p. 326.

[12]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops"

[13]Spolin, p. 326.

[14]Hutson, p. 6.

[15]Hutson, p. 3.

[16]Hutson, p. 4, 8-9.

[17]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops"

[18]Hutson, pp. 4, 10, 14, 57-58.

[19]Hutson, pp. 10-12, 57-58.

[20]Hutson, pp. 12-15.

[21]Hutson, p. 15.

[22]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[23]Hutson, pp. 15-17.

[24]Hutson, pp. 17-19.

[25]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[26]Hutson, pp. 20-23.

[27]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[28]Hutson, pp. 6-7.

[29]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[30]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[31]Spolin, pp. 357-58.

[32]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[33]Spolin, pp. 328-329, 331-32.

[34]Spolin, pp. 331-32.

[35]Spolin, pp. 332, 356, 357.

[36]Hutson, p. 55.

[37]Spolin, pp. 102-03.

[38]Spolin, p. 104.

[39]Spolin, pp. 184-88, 230.

[40]Spolin, pp. 194-95.

[41]Spolin, pp. 101-105, 158, 184-188, 194-95, 230, 338-45, 349, 359-60, 362, 369-74.

[42]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[43]Spolin, p. 363-364.

[44]Hutson, pp. 54-5.

[45]Spolin, p. 364-365.

[46]Spolin, p. 334.

[47]Spolin, p. 365.

[48]Spolin, p. 353.

[49]Spolin, p. 365.

[50]Spolin, p. 353.

[51]Spolin, p. 336-337, 353-354, 336.

[52]Spolin, p. 366.

[53]Spolin, pp. 366-67.

[54]Spolin, p. 367.

[55]Spolin, p. 355, 358-360, 367-369.

[56]Spolin, p. 361.

[57]Spolin, p. 361.

[58]Jean Shaw, "How to Write Your Own Play," Right to Read Course, Brattleboro, Vermont, Spring 1979.

III. CREATIVE DRAMA: GAMES, EXERCISES, AND IMPROVISATIONS

"Since the beginnings of civilizations, song, dance, speech, and ritual have been used to dramatize important occasions, new knowledge, and customs as a means of drawing groups of individuals together in a common bond of socialized feeling as well as for direct communication."[1]

Creative Drama, as I use the term here, includes theater games, acting exercises, improvisations, and mini-productions. Creative drama not only serves the needs of putting on a major production, it is an activity worthy of pursuit in its own right. Both theater proper and creative drama have the same roots: "the need of people to role play in order to measure themselves and their own experiences against those of others; not only to see where they are different, but also to see where they are alike."[2]

These exercises should be played to an audience consisting only of other members of the group. The emphasis is on developing the moment, not some future presentation. Even a single outside observer is likely to turn a spontaneous sharing into a performance. The students should be freed of all obligation to "be good" or "be effective."[3]

The small classroom can be a supportive environment. It is a place ripe for using creative dramatics. The various

games and techniques can be introduced gradually and with better effectiveness over a long period of time. There can be "significant opportunities" to use language through movement, expression of feelings, and sharing of one's own experiences. These exercises help coordinate body, mind, and emotion through the ideas, actions, and characters--teaching evaluation and thinking through actions and reactions. By learning to communicate, the student gains confidence in him/herself to share ideas and opinions.[4] Some of the objectives of creative dramatics are:

1. To promote expression of all kinds; movement and speech harmonizing and reinforcing each other;

2. To limber bodies, minds,and tongues;

3. To forge drama into a learning instrument for continued use throughout the school experience;

4. To make school experiences with language fun and meaningful in children's terms;

5. To habituate pupils to working autonomously in small groups;

6. To further peer socialization of a learning sort not possible outside of school;

7. To gain intuitive understanding of style as voice, role, and stance.

8. To develop, in the more familiar mode of dramatic play, those characteristics necessary for the less familiar

process of discussing, attending, responding, interacting and turn-taking;

9. To exercise and channel feelings.[5]

Creative dramatics gives all kinds of people with many different kinds of personalities, ages, problems and abilities a chance to project themselves into another personality and to legitimize ways to get attention.[6] Simulation (role-playing) is an excellent way to learn how to confront and deal with the stresses and strains of everyday life. Personal experiences are the most important resources one can draw from. Simulations are realistic because their outcomes are uncertain, just as in real life.[7]

However, role playing is safer than real life. Alternatives and different life strategies can be learned by experimentation in a protected environment. Students feel they have some control over the outcome; nobody is directing them to choose, but rather the director is acting as a guide. As is often the case, the discussions and evaluations of these sessions is where the real learning takes place.[8]

There are certain important principles to keep in mind. It's permissable to suggest, not to control. Stress independence from authority. Imagination, simplicity, and flexibility are the watchwords. All questions and ideas must be listened to and given respect and value. Very few things are absolute. The mind must stay open to new and

unusual occurances.

Be aware of who is making the decisions. Try to make the students as responsible for the decision making process as much as possible. Establish a noise/excitement threshold, creative drama tends to generate a lot of both; and you will have to develop a sense for how much to allow before either becomes self-defeating. Be willing to take an active role--possibly serve as an example for a particular exercise or game; or as a suggestor of ideas.[9]

There is a certain sequence to follow in presenting creative drama activities. Begin with full class sessions, there's safety in numbers. Then try small groups, finally individuals. The makeup of each particular class or group will determine where you will place your emphasis:

1. What are their linguistic and experiental backgrounds?

2. Is their need for action or to overcome social/emotional barriers?

3. What medium should you use, e.g., "acting," mime, or puppets, etc.?[10]

The following section contains examples of techniques, exercises and games found to be very effective in using creative dramatics in the classroom. They are also very useful in preparing for audience-oriented performances. These suggestions have been divided into five categories: (1) Sensory-observation; (2) Movement; (3), (4) Verbal and

non-verbal improvisations; (5) Planned scripts and projects.

Depending on your needs, you may choose from one or several of the categories. Ideally you will be stimulated to create activities of your own or to modify these suggestions to fit the demands of your situation. Above all, have fun and enjoy!

A. Sensory-Observation

The following exercises are good preparation for learning how to sense and observe one's environment--both external and internal. They also offer a gentle, non-threatening introduction to creative dramatics.

One piece of equipment is used so often that it bears introduction here. These are the Noun Cards. The simplest form of the noun card is a 3x5 index card with the name of some object on it, e.g., boat, tree, apple, hat, and so on. Noun cards can also be found with many language-learning packages and with primary and nursery school supplies. If you have the luxury of time or the limitation of finances, you can make your own. I suggest listing them into the three categories of people, places, and things (objects). This makes your set of noun cards more easily added to, and students frequently enjoy embellishing the words with pictures which they draw themselves.[11]

OBJECTIVE: LISTENING SKILLS:

1. Title: Common Sounds

Special Equipment: Tape recorder, pencil and paper

Procedure: Record some common sounds around the school or home, e.g., dialing a phone, running water, cooking, an animal, or dropping an object. Arrange the class so that they are quietly sitting or lying. Play the recordings and have them discuss what they've heard.

Variation: Have students make up mini-stories about the sounds they've heard.

Variation: Have students write down two or three words which they associate with each sound.[12]

2. Title: Sounds Around the Environment

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Have the class sit or lie quietly with their eyes closed just listening to the sounds around them. After a few minutes, discuss what each has heard and felt as he/she was listening.

Variation: Ask each student to hear one sound he/she thinks that no one else will notice.

Variation: Move around the environment making sounds such as tapping an object, opening a drawer, etc. Have students discuss their perceptions and reactions.

Variation: Have students pair off and make environmental sounds for each other, taking turns at being "blind" and making the sounds.

Variation: Have the students relate the sounds they're hearing to sounds they've heard in the past.

Variation: Have the students associate the sounds with imaginary situations in which they are involved, or which they're observing, e.g., as a film director.

Variation: Add an "if" to the sounds. For instance, if

you've tapped a bowl with a pencil (and everyone knows the bowl is in the room), ask them to identify the sound as if the bowl was not in the room, or hadn't even been invented.[13]

3. Title: Recall

Special Equipment: Noun (place) cards

Procedure: Have the class lie down and be quiet with eyes closed. Everyone is instructed to think of a place such as a city street, a countryside, a circus, and so on. Students who have trouble thinking of a place can draw a location from those noun cards which apply to places, or they can select from a list which you present.

One by one each student makes a sound from the environment they've chosen. Other students try to guess the source of the sound and the associated environment.[14]

4. Title: Sounds for a Story

Special Equipment: A story or poem which contains a lot of references to sounds, e.g., "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe of "The Highwayman" by Alfred Noyes.

Procedure: Tell or read a story or poem to the class. As the students listen, have them make appropriate sounds throughout the story. If you have a large or active group, you may wish to select a smaller number of "sound technicians" to provide the sounds. It may make sense to do the exercise several times to get really good at it.

Variation: Appoint a "conductor" who will vary loudness and direct entrances and exits.

Variation: Experiment with variations, especially if a sound interpretation is "obvious."

Variation: Have the students find or write appropriate literature for this exercise. A story thusly found or created is good preparation for adaptation and script writing.[15]

OBJECTIVE: SEEING SKILLS:

1. Title: The Magic Camera

Special Equipment: a supply of 3x5 index cards

Procedure: Each student is to take an imaginary picture of something in the environment. Each student then describes her/his picture in great detail. After the description, the student then hands the "photo" to some other student who must add to the description.[16]

2. Title: Seeing the Environment

Special Equipment: none

Procedure: Have the class closely examine a small area of the environment which ordinarily wouldn't receive much attention. Discuss what they've seen.

Variation: Challenge each student to observe something that no one else will notice.

Variation: Divide group into pairs and have each pair examine and compare something of their bodies or clothing; e.g., the lines in the palm of the hand, or their shoes.[17]

3. Title: A Test of Observation and Concentration

Special Equipment: A tray containing several small objects.

Procedure: Allow the students 30 to 60 seconds to see where all the objects are. Then have them look away or close their eyes while you move some of the objects around. The students must then identify the changes. As they get better at it, make the changes more subtle.

Variation: Remove some objects and replace them by others.

Variation: Have students be the object changers.

Variation: Try it with articles of clothing in the center of a group of students.

Variation: Using pictures from magazines, books, or newspapers, give the students 30 to 60 seconds to study the scene. They then must write or discuss as many details as they can remember. This works best in small groups.[18]

4. Title: Uses for an Object

Special Equipment: A bag or box full of small objects such as a pencil, pieces of wood or kitchen utencils. Noun Cards.

Procedure: Give each student an object; alternatively give an object to each small group of students. They are to devise as many uses for the object as they can. The suggestions can be written down, discussed, or pantomimed.[19]

5. Title: Test of Observation

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Have everyone close their eyes and then ask them a series of questions which will test their memories and powers of observation. For example: "How many chairs are in the room?" "How many steps are there on the stairway?" "How many people in this room have brown eyes."[20]

6. Title: Changes

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Divide the class into two facing rows. Each person is to carefully study the person opposite. Then everyone turns around and makes three changes such as rolling up a sleeve, taking off an earring, unfastening a button. On signal, everyone turns back face to face and tries to identify the changes.

Variation: Change more than three things

Variation: Change partners.[21]

7. Title: Emphatic Vision

Special Equipment: None, or Noun Cards (People)

Procedure: Have each student choose a character--famous, fictional, or otherwise. They then must describe the immediate environment as if they were that character.

Variation: Have the character chosen be an animal, inanimate object, or fantasy figure.

Variation: Describe another situation, (e.g., weather, place, or time) which would be important to the character.[22]

8. Title: Changing an Object

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the students in a circle. The leader passes an imaginary object to the first student. Each student in turn passes the object to the next. Objects should be chosen to maximize involvement, e.g., a balloon, a heavy rock, a puppy, a rattlesnake.

Variation: Students must change the size or weight of the object before they pass it on.

Variation: Students must change the type of object before they pass it on.[23]

Variation: Have the students close their eyes or be blindfolded.[24]

9. Title: Mirrors

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Students pair off and face each other. One student from each pair is designated "leader" and the other

is "mirror." The mirror must copy all of the leader's actions. Have students switch roles about every two minutes. Direct eye contact and slow, predictable movements will be very important.

Variation: Have the students initiate their own switch of roles through the intermediary of a "freeze." Whenever the leader freezes, that is the signal for the role switch.

Variation: Have the students initiate their own role switches without the freeze.[25]

10. Title: Action With No Sound

Special Equipment: A television, or ear pluggers.

Procedure: Assign students to watch a t.v. program for fifteen minutes with the sound off. If no t.v. is available, have the students plug their ears and try to follow a group of friends or family talking. Discuss the problems and reactions involved.

Variation: Listen to the sound with no picture.[26]

OBJECTIVE: TOUCH

1. Title: Guess the Object

Special Equipment: Small paper bags containing one or two small objects. Some of the objects should be similar, e.g., a potato and an onion. Other sets of objects should be dissimilar, e.g., a screwdriver and a balloon. Blindfolds (optional).

Procedure: Each student reaches into his/her bag and chooses an item to describe to the class. The student is not to name

the object or take it from the bag. The class then tries to guess the item. If the description of the object is not clear, then either have a discussion or let another student try with the same object.

Variation: Have students work in pairs.

Variation: Instead of individual bags, have one large bag with many objects from which students take turns.

Variation: Instead of using bags, use objects from around the environment. Describers can have their eyes open, guessers should not.[27]

Variation: Pair off with one of the pair blindfolded. "Seeing" partner is to lead "blind" partner to different objects. Blind partner tries to guess the object from texture, weight, and so forth.[28]

OBJECTIVE: SMELL AND TASTE

1. Title: Guess the Object

Special Equipment: Small paper bags containing objects with contrasting scents, e.g., fruits, tea bags, spice bags, balsam pillow, and so on.

Procedure: Students select an item from the bag and try to describe its smell. The other students try to guess the identity of the object.

Variation: Use analogue variations from the touch exercise, "Guess The Object."[29]

OBJECTIVE: EMOTIONAL STIMULI

1. Title: What's the Emotion?

Special Equipment: Any supply of pictures of people from magazines, books, newspapers, e.g., The Family of Man, Edward

Steichen; (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953.) Pictures showing strong emotions will work best.

Procedure: Ask the students to tell what emotions they see in the pictures. Get them to identify what facial expressions and body postures were significant to them.

Variation: Have students write or relate stories about what led up to the picture and what will happen next.

Variation: Have students improvise scenes relating to the pictures. One suggestion is a scene which begins before the picture and ends with a freeze at the moment of the picture. Another is to begin with the picture pose and start the action from there.[30]

2. Title: Teacher is Angry!

Special Equipment: A teacher willing to play the part of being angry.

Procedure: The teacher enters the room displaying obvious signs of anger, banging things around, slamming doors, scowling face and so on. After a minute or two the teacher stops, smiles, and asks the class questions such as:

"What did you notice first?

What was your reaction? Why?

What gave you clues to my feelings?

How did the class as a whole respond?

What was the atmosphere of the room?"[31]

Variation: Arrange with one student to participate in secret. Direct your anger at that student and then send him/her from the room. Ask the class how they imagine the targeted student felt.[32]

3. Title: Facial Expressions

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the class into a circle. Direct the class to display various facial expressions showing emotional states such as anger, surprise, suspicion, happiness, fright, grief, annoyance, physical suffering, admiration, ignorance, embarrassment, hesitation, defiance, scorn, pride, desire, stubborness and so on. This is an excellent warmup exercise. It not only helps to limber up the face, but it also increases an awareness of feeling and expressing emotions.

Variation: Add in relevant body postures.

Variation: Discuss what situations might provoke these emotional states.

Variation: Improvise scenes built around a principal emotional state.

Variation: Imagine yourself moving through contrasting environments, e.g., hot to cold, safe to dangerous, happiness to grief, poverty to sudden riches. Focus on how the change in emotional state is portrayed through facial expressions and body posture.[33]

4. Title: Oops, Wrong Emotion!

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Divide the class into two groups, A and B, and tell them that each group is going to get a different

set of instructions. There are three parts to the exercise. For each part, each person from group A is to have a different partner from group B. The members of group A are the talkers, the members of group B are the listeners. It is important that each group not hear the instructions for the other group.

PART 1:

A Instructions: Tell your partner about something very important to you, e.g., your career, your religion, your marriage plans, and so on.

B Instructions: Show as little or no emotions as you possibly can. Keep your face and body posture as neutral as you can. If you absolutely must, you may respond with minimal grunts or by slowly shaking your head.

PART 2:

A Instructions: Tell your partner about your childhood.

B Instructions: Respond with complete bewilderment. It's as if your partner was talking a foreign language, and you don't understand a single word.

PART 3:

A Instructions: Tell your partner about an incident during which you felt an extreme emotion, such as the death of a parent, pet or friend, the winning of an award, or

something which horribly embarrassed you.

B Instructions: Respond to your partner's story exactly the opposite to what you think the appropriate emotion should be: i.e., laugh if you hear something sad, look very despondent if you hear something happy.

Each part should be allowed about five minutes. All three parts should be finished before any discussion is allowed. After completion of the third part, reassemble the various partnerships and have them discuss what happened. Group A members should focus on how they felt about group B's reactions. Group B members should focus on how they felt giving out with inappropriate reactions.[34]

Variation: Have group B respond in other disruptive ways such as asking questions all the time, interrupting with personal anecdotes, or limiting themselves to the non-verbal. Give group A different topics. Switch the groups.[35]

5. Title: Blind Walk

Special Equipment: Blindfold (optional)

Procedure: Divid the group into pairs. One member of the pair is the leader, the other is "blind." The leader leads the "blind" partner around the classroom or through some other environment. After a few minutes, switch roles. Reassemble and discuss the experience. Pay particular attention to what other senses took over during the blindness.[36]

6. Title: Guided Fantasy

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Have students lie down in comfortable positions with their eyes closed. Narrate the following story, giving frequent long pauses: "Imagine yourself in a place which is totally safe for you. It can be a real place or an imaginary one. You are waking up in that place. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? Find an object in that place which is very interesting. What color is it? How big is it? If you can touch it with safety, reach out and touch it. How does it feel? Is it hard, soft, cold, warm? Try to lift it. Is it heavy or light? Imagine yourself moving through this place. How are you moving? Are you floating, flying, walking, swimming? Find another living creature in your place. How does it react to you? How do you react to it? If you can, touch each other. How does it feel? Do something together. What are you doing? Are you playing, fighting, or just staring at each other? Find some souvenir of your special place. Something you can bring back with you that will always remind you of this place. Now go back to sleep in your special place, and when you wake up, you will be back in the classroom."

Have students share what they saw, felt, and experienced. Have them hold up and describe their souvenirs.

B. Movement

Movement exercises are important for freeing up the body and making it more limber. They also help relieve tension, both in individuals and in groups. Movement frees the imagination and opens the emotions. Movement increases awareness of others and the participation in group process. For the student with low language skills, movement may provide an avenue for success at expression and accomplishment.[38]

Working on movement and using space constructively can be very important when working with a multi-national class. Cultures differ widely in how they use space, and an awareness of this will ease certain transitions. For instance, Latin Americans tend to stand quite close to each other by U.S.A. standards. The articulation of "personal space" can sometimes lead to frustrating misunderstandings which discussion will alleviate.[39]

One of the most important aspects of movement are the warmup exercises. I would strong suggest doing some form of warmup exercise to start off each dramatic session. They purge the soul of the burdens of ordinary life and prepare the class for "something special." Done properly, warmups are both fun and already part of the creative process.

OBJECTIVE: WARMUPS

1. Title: Yoga, and So On

Special Equipment: Floor mats, rugs, clean floor space.

Procedure: If you are acquainted with Yoga, almost any regimen will be excellent. If you have no other alternatives, ordinary gym calisthenics will do, but something more creative would be preferable. For instance, imagine what it would be like to be attacked first by a single bee, then several, then many, then finally a whole swarm.[40]

2. Title: Hay, Hee, Haw

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the students in a circle. The exercise has three parts. The first time through, it should be done slowly and softly. The second time through it should be done a little faster and a little louder. Four run throughs is about ideal.

PART 1:

Step to the left with the left foot, point to the left with the left index finger, and say, "Hay!" Step to the right with the right foot, point to the right with the right index finger, and say, "Hay!" Return to the position between steps.

PART 2:

Step to the center with the left foot, point to a person across the circle with the left index finger, make a monster

face, and say, "Hee!" Step to the center with the right foot, point to a different person across the circle with the right index finger, make a different monster face, and say, "Hee!" Return to the position between steps.

PART 3:

Left foot on tip toe, left index finger pointed directly overhead, left side stretched, say, "Haw!" Right foot on tip toe, right index finger pointed directly overhead, right side stretched, say, "Haw!"[41]

3. Title: The Face

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Begin by massaging the face, pulling it into weird and wonderful positions as if it were plastic. Then count off cadence as if this were ordinary calisthenics: "Faces up! Faces down!" "Faces in, faces out!" "Faces left, faces right." Pay particular attention to the action of lips, jaws, and (especially) eyes.[42]

4. Title: Magic Gum

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the class into a circle. Have the students take out a piece of imaginary gum, carefully unwrap it, and begin to chew it. Instruct them to swallow it, and then inform that that the gum is magnetic, and there is a

child with a gum magnet standing about three feet in front of them. The magnet pulls their stomachs forward. Then the child with the gum begins to move around them in a circle, first in one direction and then the other. As the child with the magnet moves, the exercisers are pulled (hence stretched) in that direction.

Variation: The gum can stick in various other parts of the body as the magnet moves around, e.g., throat, midchest, and so on.[43]

4. Title: Group Mirroring

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the students in a circle. Each child in turn must initiate some repetitive action. Everyone else mirrors the action. Leadership passes around the circle until each student has had an opportunity.[44]

Variation: A game called "Indian Chief." One student is chosen to leave the circle and wait at a distance. Another student is chosen to be the Indian Chief. The chief begins some repetitive action and all the others copy. The other student is called back and he/she tries to guess who the chief is. The chief should try to change the actions as often as possible.[45]

6. Title: The Twitch

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the students in a circle. Tell them to imagine that they are about to be possessed by a twitch. The twitch starts in the index finger of the right hand. The twitch then grows in power and intensity as it invades the other parts of the body. Call out these parts in sequence: Other fingers, hand, arm, shoulder, other arm, head, back, pelvis, leg, foot, toes. By the time you reach toes, everyone should be twitching all over. Then the twitch gradually leaves the body in the same order: finger, hands, arms, and so on.[46]

OBJECTIVE: BODY MOVEMENT, AWARENESS OF OTHERS, GROUP PARTICIPATION

1. Title: Statues

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the class as an audience. Ask for four or five volunteers. Arrange the volunteers on stage in a semi-circle open to the audience. The first volunteer steps forward and takes a frozen position. One by one the other volunteers come forward and adopt frozen positions in order to create a statue.

This exercise can also be used to stress the importance of stage picture. There should be at least one and no more than two statue members at each level; high, medium, low. Statue members should not obstruct the audience's view of other members. Facial expressions should somehow relate to statue parts. Each member of the statue should create a focus

of attention by their lines-of-sight. Every member of the statue should be touching at least one other member. The statue should be built so that members who are unstable will be supported. The statue should remain frozen for a long count of five and then should disassemble smoothly with all members returning to the semi-circle to await critical review and feedback.

Variation: The first volunteer should come forward in a semi-controlled manner and freeze on impulse into a random position. Subsequent volunteers should come forward in a semi-controlled fashion and freeze on contact.

Variation: The first volunteer comes forward and freezes into an unstable position which will require support. The second volunteer supports the first and then, in turn, becomes unstable and requiring of support. The last volunteer provides the final support and solidarity.

Variation: Instead of arranging the volunteers in a semi-circle have them moving at random within a designated area. By a "certain feeling" the group will freeze into a statue.

Variation: Have the audience decide how the statue elements should position themselves.

Variation: Have the audience determine the name of the statue before the volunteers assume their positions. Alternatively have the audience name the statue after its construction.[47, 48]

2. Title: Machines

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the students as an audience. Have four or five volunteers "on stage" in a semi-circle open to the audience. The first volunteer steps forward and begins a strong, repetitive motion accompanied by a sound. The other volunteers join the first with sounds and motions of their own. All parts of the machine must be touching. There must be at least one and no more than two machine elements at each of the three levels: high, medium, and low.

The first volunteer sets the rhythm. Other machine elements must follow that rhythm. When the first volunteer stops in a freeze, the others should also come to a stop.

Variation: Begin machine from a statue position. (See previous exercise.)[49, 50]

3. Title: Stagecoach

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Have the students arranged as an audience or in a semi-circle. Start to tell a story of the old west as if you were the driver of a stagecoach. As you tell the story, you will mention various parts of the stagecoach, e.g., wheels, doors, horses, windows, seats, and so on. As you mention a part, one or more volunteers must come forward and become that part. Make sure your description is active. End the story in disaster.

Some students may be reluctant to spontaneously volunteer. This may provoke a discussion on risk-taking. If you have a shy group, you may wish to assemble the students in a line, and the student at the head of the line always has the obligation to become the next part.

Variation: Try different stories involving other constructions, e.g., the sinking of the Titanic, the Wreck of Old 97 (railroad train).[51]

4. Title: Obstacles

Special Equipment: A room or area strewn with obstacles, e.g., chairs, tables, rocks, or areas designated with chalk marks.

Procedure: Select a team of volunteers to enter the area with a special task and time limit. Some examples are: this is a mine field which must be made safe; the team is attempting to transverse a haunted or magical forest; they are escaping from a prison.[52]

Variation: Construct an airplane out of students, or use a single (blindfolded) student. The airplane starts out at one end of the obstacle course. At the other end is a "control tower." The control tower attempts to guide the airplane through the obstacles. Alternatively use several airplanes and/or several air traffic controllers.[53]

5. Title: Sports-Using Balls

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Each student is to create an imaginary ball. Have them explore the ball in terms of its size, weight, bounciness, shape, ways to catch and throw, and other motions. Have students work in small groups exchanging their balls. Work out a group scene with one of the balls in a particular sport.[54]

6. Title: Crossways Center

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the class in a circle. Count off by one's and two's. Have the one's go through the center of the circle and come out the other side without touching anyone. Then have the two's do the same thing. Vary the speeds. Have both groups moving at the same time. Make the action continuous, that is, as soon as you reach the other side you make a U-turn and go back through the center.[55]

7. Title: Molecules

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: The exercise begins as in "Crossways Center" (see immediately above). In this instance, however, the students are molecules. If two molecules touch they react and form a new chemical element; i.e., they must ever thereafter stick together. Any molecule subsequently touching a chain or clump will also stick to it.

Variation: The same exercise except that one's are attracted to other one's and repelled by two's; and visa-versa.[56]

8. Title: The Alphabet Game

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange students in a circle. Begin the first student with the letter "A," the second with "B" and so on through the alphabet. Students are to shape their bodies into forms suggesting the letter. They are also to say the letter out loud.

Once you've gone through the entire alphabet, go through it again. Except this time the students are to suggest their letter through an action, not a person. Furthermore they are to suggest their letter with a sound, not just the letter itself.

Variation: Have students spell out their names with actions and sounds.

Variation: Include numbers, days of the week, months of the year.[57]

OBJECTIVE: BODY MOVEMENTS: LEARNING AND FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS

1. Title: Sequence of Movements Activity

Special Equipment: Large space, padded floor or thick rugs. Small drum or other rhythm instrument (optional).

Procedure: Direct students to walk through the environment to the rhythm which you establish. Vary the rhythm.

Call out instructions such as hop, skip, jump, and so on. Call out other instructions such as "freeze!" or "fall down!". If the floor or rug has a pattern, get them to trace out designs with their motion using that pattern. Demand that they avoid touching, then demand that they do. Have them imagine sudden changes in the nature of the walking surface; now it's sand, now it's ice, now it's molasses. Endow them all with imaginary swords and the instructions to fight everyone they encounter. Give them imaginary flowers to exchange.

The basic idea is to keep changing the instructions and the perceived environment. You may wish to script perhaps a dozen changes for your own benefit; but you should also observe the group and let ideas come to you.

Variation: Allow the students to call out their own suggested instructions.[58]

2. Title: Simple Movement

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the students in a circle. Begin with a student about whose cooperation you feel confident. Each student must take a turn, stepping into the center of the circle and performing the action which you suggest. Some may try to hurry the action. Have them slow down, perhaps by asking them questions about what they're doing. Some suggestions: Eat an ice cream cone, cotton candy, hot toasted

marshmallow, and ear of corn. Walk through deep snow, leaves, a rainstorm, a plowed field, a windstorm, up and down sand dunes, across pebbles in bare feet, in high heels, in sandles or boots, with a cast on one leg, carrying something very heavy, or with a dog on a leash. Touch something hot. Handle something squishy.

You may wish to prepare yourself with a list of items; but you should also let ideas come to you as the action develops.

Variation: Let the students suggest activities for each other.[59]

3. Title: Simple Transformations

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the students in a large circle with plenty of space. You will suggest an object in the process of change. As you slowly count from one to ten, the students must accomplish that change, as if they were that object. Some suggestions are: a melting ice cube, a burning candle or match, a sleeping dog slowly falling off a couch, Dr. Jeckle becoming Mr. Hyde, a frog becoming a prince, a feather drifting to ground.[60]

4. Title: Unroll and Become

Special Equipment: Comfortable floor space

Procedure: This exercise can be done by individuals or by everyone in the group simultaneously. Everyone starts

rolled up on the floor in a ball. The leader tells the group, "Unroll and become...." Then suggest an animal, object, character, or imaginary thing. The students assume the suggested form, uttering appropriate sounds when relevant. Then the leader says, "Roll up!" Students go back into the ball position and await the next suggestion.[61]

C. Non-Verbal Improvisation

Katherine Walker defines pantomine as: "The accomplishment of conveying sense without speech by imitating action or by using gesture which someone else understands."[62] It's like hearing someone think. But, because action is involved, it's not just thinking. The power of pantomine is in the communication of emotion and ideas through facial expressions, body movements, and concentration.[63] Pantomine is an important and accessible part of creative dramatics.[64]

Many of the exercises which follow can be facilitated by the use of Object Cards, Place Cards, or People Cards. All of these cards can be made easily using 3x5 index cards. Some of them can be purchased as part of language skill kits or primary grade flashcards. Object cards are the names of objects, e.g., hats, balls, trees, toothbrushes, and so on. Place cards are the names of places, rivers, cities, circuses, and so on. (There may be some overlap.) People cards are recognizeable roles: banker, fireman, teacher, typist, or student.

For the purposes of pantomine, object, place, and people cards all imply an action. That is, every object can be used in a way which identifies it; every place gives rise to characteristic activities, and people behave in ways which reveal their identities.

Creating your own sets of cards can be a useful linguistic experience. It can also be a lot of fun. Children particularly like to illustrate the cards with pictures which they draw. The cards can also do double duty as flashcards for vocabulary review.[65]

Another important resource are books or language skill cards on creative writing, which often contain story starters, such as: catching your first big fish, catching a burglar picking a lock, saying goodbye of someone leaving forever, or losing your ticket for a bus, train, or airplane. These also can be easily made.[66]

OBJECT: ACTION PANTOMINE

1. Title: The Cards

Special Equipment: Object Cards, Place Cards, People Cards.

Procedure: Arrange the students as an audience. Students take turns. Each student draws three Object Cards (or three Place Cards or three People Cards) and selects one. The student then acts out in silence some use of the object. The rest of the class tries to guess what the object chosen is. If the class fails to guess, the name of the object is revealed and the student repeats the interpretation.

Variation: Student draws one Object Card, one Place Card, and one People Card and pantomines a combined interpretation.

Sometimes this can get a bit absurd, e.g., a banker with a toothbrush on an airplane. But it also can be very rewarding,[67, 68]

Variation: Use story starter cards.

2. Title: Building a Wall

Special Equipment: A Heavy Rock (optional)

Procedure: Arrange the students in an audience or in a circle. Practice picking up a heavy rock and putting it down. Concentrate on the action of the fingers at the moments of grasp and release. Have students demonstrate with an actual rock and note the changes in their own body posture. Then have them repeat with the imaginary heavy rock, trying to duplicate not only the posture and finger position, but also their involvement with and belief in the heaviness of the rock.

Have three students pile their rocks on top of each other. They will discover that you have to concentrate both on your own task and the task of others. Then have three students build a wall from a pile of rocks. Some typical problems: rocks are not placed directly on top of each other, the wall fails to gain in height, careless students will cause the wall to "disappear" by carelessly violating it with arm or foot.

Variation: Build other objects such as a log cabin or a brick fireplace.

Variation: After building something, tear it down.[69]

3. Title: Blue Sheet

Special Equipment: A blue sheet

Procedure: Arrange the students in the form of an audience. Volunteers are to come on stage and mime a scene or character using the blue sheet. It works best if you can demonstrate first. Place the blue sheet on the floor in the shape of a circle. Imagine it is a pond on a hot day. Go swimming in it. Other ideas: a tennis net, a diaper, a cape, a caterpiller caccoon. Volunteer groups are fine.

Variation: The first uses of the blue sheet are likely to be very short vignettes or even statues. Demand more of a coherent story with a beginning, middle, and end.

Variation: Use the blue sheet with object, place or people cards. Note that this reverses the nature of the creativity called for.[70]

4. Title: Liferaft

Special Equipment: Pieces of cardboard or marked floor areas about two foot square.

Procedure: Students are divided into small groups and assigned to floor areas. These floor areas are life rafts. The students should practice moving to the swell of the ocean and miming thirst and discomfort. One by one the liferafts sink and the survivors are forced to crowd into the remaining craft.

Variation: Have students mime being on other vehicles: e.g., a crowded train, balloon, or stagecoach.[71]

5. Title: Homonyms

Special Equipment: A list of homonyms

Procedure: Part of the richness of English is its ample supply of homonyms. They are also a source of some bewilderment. Arrange the students in audience format and call for two volunteers. Each one is to mime one of a pair of homonyms: e.g., hair/hare; rain/reign. Challenge the audience to guess.

Variation: Use other word pairs, e.g., rhymes, synonyms, and so on.

OBJECTIVE: CREATING SITUATIONS AND STORIES THROUGH MIME

1. Title: Creating Conflict

Special Equipment: Object Cards, Place Cards, People Cards.

Procedure: Arrange the students in audience format. Choose a pair of volunteers. The first volunteer picks three cards from one deck or one card from each deck. The volunteer then selects one of those cards and mimes an appropriate activity. As soon as the first volunteer has clearly established the activity, the second volunteer enters and comes into conflict. For instance, if the chosen card is a toothbrush, the first volunteer can be brushing her/his teeth and the second can enter demanding use of the sink.

Variation: The second volunteer does not know the identity of the card chosen by the first.

Variation: "Cooperation." The second volunteer must join the activity of the first.

In the above exercise it is important to stress the validity of the conflict. Younger students will have a tendency to come on stage and disrupt the activity physically or without apparent motivation. To build dramatic skills, the conflict must be allowed to develop slowly and come to coherent resolution.[73]

2. Title: Interests

Special Equipment: Paper and writing instruments

Procedure: Arrange the class into groups of four or five. Within each group students must write down several interests each one has, e.g., painting, dancing collecting tadpoles, and so on. When the interests have been written, each group must pick one and devise a skit around it. Each group then performs their skit while the rest observe in audience format. Planning time should be short, no more than three to five minutes. The audience will be invited to offer critical review. The skits should have beginnings, middles, and ends. There should always be some point of conflict and another of resolution.

Variation: Allow dialogue.[74]

3. Title: Opposing Descriptions

Special Equipment: A list of situations which could have entirely different interpretations, e.g., (A) Two people are in a liferaft. One of them is delirious from having drunk seawater. The other is trying to get the first to signal to an airplane flying overhead. (B) One person is in a bathtub. The other is a drunk who interrupts the bath.

Procedure: Arrange the class in audience format. Call for volunteer pairs. Show one description to one of the volunteers, the other description to the other volunteer. Students mime the situation. Afterwards, ask for evaluations.

Variation: Gibberish dialogue is allowed.[75]

4. Title: Pantomining Song

Special Equipment: Record or Tape Player (optional)

Procedure: Arrange the class as an audience or in a circle. A smaller group of students from one to five are chosen as volunteers. Play or sing songs which have a lot of clear imagery, e.g., "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," "She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain." The volunteers act out the images and actions of the song.[76]

5. Title: Shadow Plays

Special Equipment: A sheet tightly stretched across a frame or hung from a rope. (Note: such a combination of sheet and frame is often used in designing scenery. This is a good way to use the sheet before it's painted.) Strong

back lighting.

Procedure: Seat group in front of sheet in audience format. Select one or more volunteers. Makeup or read a story. Volunteers act out the story in such a manner that only their shadows can be seen. This exercise is particularly useful for students who are not expressive with their bodies.[77]

Variation: Use handshadows.

D. VERBAL IMPROVISATIONS

Using spoken dialogue in improvisations opens up a whole new realm of possibilities for expression, but also presents problems. In many ways our society disassociates us from our bodies, and this is reflected in a phenomenum called, "The Talking Heads." That is, as soon as the students are able to use their voices they forget all about their bodies. You will have to establish your own balance between allowing the improvisations to find their own direction and keeping the students aware of stage picture and action. If you are using these exercises in conjunction with producing a play, I would suggest more side-coaching than otherwise.[78,79]

Note: To enhance (or work on problems) using different dialects and accents, discuss or use them in the exercises below as variations.[80]

OBJECTIVE: DIALOGUE WITHOUT STORY

1. Title: Levels

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Two volunteer students are to have an ordinary conversation, about the weather, their homework, current events. Define three levels, high, medium, and low. Both cannot be at the same level and no one can be at the same level for more than one sentence. If they both arrive at the same level simultaneously, one or both must immediately change.

Variation: Begin with a gibberish dialogue instead of

actual words.[81]

2. Title: Inappropriate Conversation

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Two volunteer students are to have a very ordinary conversation while engaged in a totally different sort of activity. The topic of the conversation should be as boring as possible, e.g., recipes, weather, pet care, and so on. The activity should be very involving, although it is probably better to start with a relatively mild one and build, e.g., flying a kite, sinking in quicksand, fighting off wild dogs, and so on. At no time may the students refer in their conversation to the activity in which they are involved, nor may the tone or loudness of their conversation reflect that activity level.[82]

3. Title: Verbal Mirrors

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Two volunteer students are to have a conversation. Student A is restricted to making comments about student B's appearance. Examples: "You are wearing a sweater." "You look uneasy." "Your fists are clenched." Student B must reply with an exact repetition of what is said, e.g., "I am wearing a sweater." "I look uneasy." "My fists are clenched."

There are two difficulties to be overcome. Student B will try to embroider or expand on the material. Don't allow that. Student A may run out of observations quickly.

That is often a sign of non-involvement. Encourage student A to dig deeper and to expand his/her range of observations.

Variation: Accompany verbal mirrors with physical mirrors.[83]

4. Title: Endowment, Yes...And

Special Equipment: Noun Cards (optional)

Procedure: Student A is to decide who or what student B is to be. Student B is to have no idea of who or what he/she is. As in the above exercise, student A makes observations about B's appearance, except the references are to B's imaginary appearance. Student B repeats the observation exactly and conforms to the new information he/she has just received about him/herself. When student B thinks he/she finally understands what they are, student B expands with description with an "and" statement. Example:

A: You are white.

B: I am white.

A: You are cold.

B: I am cold.

A: Your eyes are lumps of coal.

B: My eyes are made of lumps of coal, and my nose is a carrot![84]

5. Title: Make Me Laugh

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the class as an audience and ask for one volunteer. Members of the audience come forward one by one and try to make the volunteer laugh within 60 seconds. They can do whatever they want except to touch the volunteer. If the volunteer laughs, the successful student takes his/her place.[85]

6. Title: Yes - NO

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Arrange the students into pairs. Student A may say only "yes" and student B may say only "No." Experiment with the range of possibilities of different ways to say these two words. It is important that they learn to respond to each other's verbal and non-verbal cues. Be careful to monitor the energy level as this exercise can get quite confrontative and may bring up issues and reactions which can be quite strong.[86]

Variation: Allow some flexibility, e.g., "Absolutely!" "Definitely not!" "Without a doubt!"[87]

7. Title: The Vocabulary List

Special Equipment: Two volunteer students are each provided with a vocabulary list. They are to have a conversation which uses words from their lists in the order in which they appear. The words must be used appropriately, and the students must legitimately respond to each other.

Variation: This exercise can be run as a contest. If

the students are using the same list, the student who uses the greater number of words "wins." Students can use different lists, in which case the student which finishes his/her list first "wins."[88]

Variation: Make it operatic: players must sing their parts.[89]

8. Title: Television/Radio

Special Equipment: None, or broken T.V. or Radio.

Procedure: Arrange the class as an audience. Ask for five volunteers. Four of the volunteers are to represent radio or television stations. Take some time to determine what will be on each channel, e.g., a cooking lesson, a news broadcast, a soap opera, and a children's science show. The fifth volunteer plays the role of a dissatisfied viewer switching back and forth among the channels. As the viewer switches channels, each of the other volunteers suddenly come to life and are cut off by turns. The various "channels" may have to be reminded that they can't pick up exactly where they were last cut off, that the time lapse must be a part of where they resume.[90]

OBJECTIVE: DIALOGUE WITH STORY

1. Title: Storytime

Special Equipment: A well known story such as "Snow White," or "Jack and the Beanstalk."

Procedure: Begin by reading the story or having the students read it to each other out loud. Make a list of the

characters. You may wish to discuss some of the characters, what motivates them, and what they might look like.

The next phase is the casting of the parts. The casting of the parts is done by acting out a scene from the story involving those students who are trying out for the parts. In the example of "Jack and the Beanstalk," you might start with all of the students trying out for the part of Jack with all of the students trying out for the part of the mother paired off into casting teams.

Each casting team would then improvise the scene. It is typically the case in these stories that the actions of the scene is carried in the story by at most two or three sentences, while the interactions on stage will be much more elaborate. What you are seeking for is variety and creativity of interpretation. The advantage of the well known story is that while the objective of each scene is clearly known, the characterizations are not, hence they are open improvisation. In the case of Jack's mother, for instance, one student might play her as a housefrump, another as a society queen, still another as a total featherbrain, and so on. The important element of this exercise is to experiment and take risks, and to be totally irreverent when it comes to interpretation. Surprise is the greatest ally of the improvisor.

The next step is to get the students to vote on who they think has "won" the part. The casting improvisation will

give you valuable information on where your talent resources are, the voting will give you equally valuable information of how this is perceived of by your group. It may, for instance, work to your benefit (in a major production) to cast a natural leader in a lead role even when another student might be marginally better for the part.

Line up the candidates for each part facing the audience and instruct them to close their eyes. Stand behind the candidates and ask the audience to applaud for each when you hold your hand over each one's head. Stress that everyone should be applauded. Since you will decide who has "won," you will have some discretionary powers.

Once the first few parts have been thusly cast, proceed to the other parts using the same technique. In the subsequent scene, Jack with Cow, you will use the Jack you just cast with candidates for the Cow. "Losers" in the original casting are free to try out for subsequent parts. The paradox of this method is that the losers usually get to try out for many more parts than winners, thus sweetening the agony of defeat.

Be mindful of the fact that certain parts can be very creative in the improvisation which are only very minor parts of the original story. In "Jack," for instance, the beanstalk itself can be cast as a part, often with very surprising results.

Continue the sequence of scenes from the story, casting the parts as you go along. It is often the case that by the time you finish casting the last part, you have also finished the story. Whether you now choose to do an entire run-through of the "play" is now up to you. The business of the exercise is in the casting, the discovery, and the surprise. The actual run-through may be a bit of an anti-climax.

Keep the pace brisk, don't spend too much time on any one scene. If you intend to use this technique to cast a story to use for an actual production, you will probably be best served by first trying it out on a story which you do not intend to use.

Variation: Reverse the speaking and non-speaking roles. That is, the traditional speaking roles must be mimed while the ordinarily inanimate or non-speaking parts carry the dialogue. For example, in "Cinderella" only the mice, pumpkin, and slipper have speaking parts, the rest are mimed.[91]

2. Title: Conflicts

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Ask members of the class to identify conflict situations which come from their own personal lives. Typically, these will cluster around relationships with family members and authority figures. A volunteer will relate an actual conflict situation with a beginning, middle (or crisis), and end (resolution). Find other volunteers willing

to role-play the conflict situation.

"Role playing is the practice or experience of 'being someone else'.... It brings to the students a method that allows them to explore their feelings about the situations in life which most fundamentally shape their attitudes and values."[92] The students see that their ideas and feelings are not so weird or unusual. The real-life dangers are missing. Problems of personality as well as society are represented.[93]

Role playing conflict situations is potentially dangerous. It is not unusual for an "actor" to get so involved in the role play that he/she stops playing and is actually living out the situation. Since your objective is not therapy, you must insist on a "performance awareness." You should know your class well enough to avoid selecting students for situations which may prove to be too volatile. Be ready to intervene if the action gets too heated, or suddenly "blocks," either of which can be signs that the participants have lost performance awareness.

From time to time, "freeze" the action and ask one of the characters to offer a soliloquy on how they are feeling at that exact moment. This is a luxury which real life does not allow us, but which is important for developing depth.

After each scenario, encourage critical feedback from the "audience." First try to concentrate this feedback

on the performance, not the subject matter of the scene. Then, if you wish, go into the feelings of both audience and players to what has transpired. In a conflict situation, anger is often an issue. To act "anger" frequently involves getting in touch with your own sources of anger, what it felt like, how you looked, and how your voice reflected that anger. But a performance of anger is <u>not</u> the same as being angry.[94,95]

E. PLANNED SCRIPTS AND PROJECTS

Planned dialogue or projects which have been researched prior to presentation also have a place in creative dramatics. Among other things, they are effective in preparing for staging major productions. Spontaneity, creativity, and having a small (known) audience are still possible while also enabling the student to start practicing "formal" presentations.

1. Title: Check-ins

Special Equipment: None

Procedure: Prior to warmup exercises or any other group activity, I suggest arranging the class into a circle and having a check-in time. Checking in means to go around the circle giving each member a chance to discuss the feelings, ideas, and events which have happened since the last meeting together. It helps not only in building and fostering group togetherness and listening skills, but also it serves as an excellent practice session for speaking English. Usually, students plan what they want to say. Personal poetry is to be encouraged. Material offered during check-in should never be subjected to critical review or correction.[96]

2. Title: Choral Reading

Special Equipment: Selections of prose or poetry which have definite rhythm, conversational quality, and a change

of mood such as (Vachel Lindsay, Charles Swinburne, Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling).[97]

Procedure: Choral reading is the process of a group of people speaking or reading a piece in unison. It's an excellent way to work on stress, intonation, vocabulary, and rhythm. The more variety there is within the piece the wider the range of tonal qualities you'll have to deal with. "The results will vary according to the situation of being completely spontaneous and improvised...or something with more artistic result."[98]

Begin with a volunteer who will read the entire selection out loud. Discuss how the different sections could be treated. Reread it adding one more or a few students. Continue rereading adding more students each time until the entire class is involved.[99]

3. Title: Famous or Historical Events

Special Equipment: A book or calendar which lists famous or historical events, e.g., anniversaries or births and deaths, Martin Luther King Day, July 4th, Thanksgiving and so on.

Procedure: Have the group cooperate in writing a script which captures the essence of the event. Instead of focusing on the famous characters involved, you might wish to script imaginary "little people" and their reactions. Remember that all good scenes have a beginning, a middle (crisis or conflict), and an end (resolution).[100,101]

4. Title: Presenting Research Projects

Special Equipment: A research project or experiment.

Procedure: In an academic setting, students are frequently assigned research projects of a scientific, sociological, or historical nature. Learning how to present these reports is useful in overcoming shyness, developing "presentation presence" (especially in front of groups), and organizing material. Stress eye contact, stance, variations in pace, and use of language.

Variation: After the presentation, have two or three volunteers improvise a skit on how the material presented might apply in a real-life situation.[102]

5. Title: Adapting Scripts From Pictures

Special Equipment: Pictures with expressive facial expressions from magazines, photo albums, books, or newspapers. Pencils and paper.

Procedure: Have the students choose two people in the pictures and write a short speech for each character as if they were speaking to each other. Arrange the students as an audience and ask for volunteers to play out their short skits.

Variation: Have the students choose any exercises or stories they know and create short dialogue to present to the class.[103]

Variation: Plan a variety show of all the favorite skits of the students and present it to a small audience.[104]

NOTES

[1]Charles R. Duke, Creative Dramatics and English Teaching. (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1973), p. 20.

[2]Duke, p. 25.

[3]Duke, pp. 25, 27-8.

[4]Duke, pp. 29-30, 33-4.

[5]Duke, pp. 37-8.

[6]Duke, pp. 39-40, 59.

[7]Duke, pp. 49=52, 55.

[8]Duke, pp. 49-52, 55.

[9]Duke, pp. 65-9.

[10]Duke, pp. 77-8.

[11]George Morgan Russmann, "Clowning Workshops," Brattleboro, Vermont: Fall 1980, Winter 1980-1981, Spring 1981, Summer 1981, Spring-Summer 1982.

[12]Duke, p. 123.

[13]Duke, pp. 123-24.

[14]"Drama in the Classroom," (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), p. 1-2.

[15]Duke, pp. 124-25.

[16]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[17]Duke, p. 127.

[18]Duke, p. 127.

[19]Duke, p. 127.

[20]Duke, p. 127.

[21]"Drama in the Classroom," pp. 1-2.

[22]"Drama in the Classroom," pp. 1-2.

[23]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[24]Duke, p. 132.

[25]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[26]Duke, p. 144.

[27]Duke, pp. 126-27.

[28]"Drama in the Classroom," pp. 1-2.

[29]Duke, p. 128.

[30]Duke, p. 121.

[31]Duke, p. 122.

[32]Duke, p. 122.

[33]Duke, pp. 81, 132-34.

[34]Duke, p. 134.

[35]"Communications Workshop," Windham Southeast Supervisory Union, Brattleboro, Vermont, Winter 1981-1982.

[36]"Drama in the Classroom," pp. 1-2.

[37]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[38]Duke, p. 79.

[39]Duke, pp. 82-84.

[40]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[41]Stephen Stearns and Peter Gould, "Performers Workshop," Barre, Vermont, Spring 1981.

[42]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[43]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[44]Gini Milkey (Director), "Whetstone International Folk Dance Ensemble Rehearsals." Brattleboro, Putney and Westminster, Vermont, Fall 1978-Summer 1982.

[45]Viola Spolin, Improvisation for the Theater (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p. 67.

[46]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[47]Duke, p. 130.

[48]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[49]Duke, pp. 49-50, 132.

[50]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[51]Duke, p. 132.

[52]Duke, p. 130.

[53]"Theater Games Workshop," School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont, School Year 1977-1978.

[54]Duke, pp. 129-130.

[55]Duke, p. 128.

[56]Duke, p. 128.

[57]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[58]Mina Swaminathan, Drama in Schools (New Delhi, India: National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1968), pp. 38-39.

[59]Duke, p. 131.

[60]"Drama in the Classroom," pp. 1-2.

[61]"Drama in the Classroom," pp. 1-2.

[62]Duke, p. 84.

[63]Duke, pp. 84-85, 135.

[64]Duke, p. 86.

[65]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[66]Duke, pp. 137-39.

[67]Duke, pp. 135-36.

[68]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[69]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[70]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[71]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[72]Duke, p. 137.

[73]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[74]"Theater Games Workshop."

[75]Duke, p. 138.

[76]Natalie Bovee Hutson, Stage (Stevensville, Michigan: Educational Services, Inc., 1968), pp. 61.

[77]Duke, p. 108.

[78]Duke, p. 93.

[79]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[80]Duke, p. 141.

[81]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[82]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[83]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[84]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[85]"Drama in the Classroom," pp. 1-2.

[86]"Drama in the Classroom," pp. 1-2.

[87]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[88]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[89]Hutson, p. 61.

[90]"Drama in the Classroom," pp. 1-2.

[91]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[92]Duke, pp. 95, 107.

[93]Duek, pp. 96, 105.

[94]Duke, 95-102, 104-05, 107.

[95]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[96]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[97]Hutson, pp. 24-25, 39.

[98]Hutson, pp. 24-25.

[99]Hutson, pp. 26-27.

[100]Hutson, pp. 80-185.

[101]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[102]Russmann, "Clowning Workshops."

[103]Duke, pp. 143-44.

[104]Hutson, p. 61.

APPENDIX I

Jean Shaw, a teacher from Dummerston, Vermont, discovered and wrote down a very relevant and inclusive format for how to script your own play. She suggests an investment of approximately 40 minutes per day over a period of several weeks. You should adapt this to your own needs; but remember what she said: "All one needs is a little bit of ham, a flair for writing, and an ability to let things happen with you and your students." I give it here in its entire format.

WEEKS 1 AND 2:

Day 1: Brainstorming (10 minutes each)

a. Characters

b. Setting

c. Situations

Get approximately 50 suggestions for each. Accept everything with tremendous enthusiasm. It might be helpful to have several students keep lists as you go along.

Days 2 and 3:

List characters and discuss the need for:

a. Original characters (which eliminates book, TV, movie, and other stock characters).

b. An evil force or character

c. A funny character or situation

d. A hero

e. Characters who help the action take place.

Call and relist evil, funny, hero and helper characters. Choose one or two of each with, possibly, several helpers. Clarify the background of any unusual characters.

Day 4:

From the list, choose situations and characters which would provide problems to be solved or trouble to be overcome. Choose two or three possible settings.

Day 5:

Begin to work situations into a story sequence with problems which are stated in Scene I and compounded in Scene II.

Day 6:

Problems are solved in Scene III.

Decide exact number of characters. Every student who chooses to be involved should have a part. Planning two complete casts will give you more leeway. It is useful to have some minor characters as helpers who can step into major roles if necessary.

Days 7, 8, and 9:

Walk through Scenes I, II, and III.

Outline the scenes on a blackboard. Everyone who

wants to have a chance at a part should walk through it in a conversation mode. The teacher and students write down their observations of what's going on.

Day 10:

Discuss possibilities for the name of the play and choose one. Discuss the set, special effects, and scheduling.

Weekend:

Take the conversations home and pull it into a play, using as much student input as possible. This is a hard weekend. It takes at least two writings, plus getting it ready to duplicate.

a. Make the speaking parts roughly equal.
b. Put happenings in sequence.
c. Put in an occasional piece of information to help the audience.
d. Provide transitional bridges from one section to another.
e. Be sure the action moves and that the story goes forward.
f. Weed out the non-essential dialogue.

With an older group, this might involve an additional two weeks of class work. With younger groups, this responsibility will fall mainly on the teacher. The objective is for the children

to see how the story plot needs to be put together with a good beginning, middle, and ending. It is also instructive for them to realize the amount of revision a story may need, and how it may change before it is a finished product.

WEEK 3:

Day 1:

Scripts! Read through the whole play with a different student taking each part in each scene.

Day 2:

Put the cast of characters on the blackboard. Students sign up for tryouts. It is recommended to have two full casts.

Days 3 and 4:

Go through the play, letting each student try the parts that they've signed up for. Usually by the end of this session, you will know who will be good in which parts, and so will they. Additionally, everyone becomes familiar with several parts.

Day 4 (afternoon):

Assign parts and have students underline their own lines. Stress content rather than exact wording. Also stress cues. After class is over, have volunteers help with painting scenery and making props. (Large sheets of newsprint make

acceptable substitutes for the more traditional theater "flats".)

Day 5:

Run through the entire play twice with each complete cast observing the other. Discuss the costumes. Keep them simple.

Weekend:

Set up the scenery. Put on the finishing touches on costumes, i.e., hats, and so on.

WEEK 4:

Day 1:

Rehearse the entire play using scripts, scenery, and props with both casts. Be sure to stop often for stage directions.

Day 2:

Go through the entire play with both casts. Have a prompter, but no scripts. By now they should know their lines.

Day 3:

SHOWTIME! Costumes are simple, they can usually be worn that day. Additional costuming and makeup should take about ½ an hour.

Audience:

Keep the numbers small. Children are a wonderful and comfortable audience.

Jean Shaw, 1979[58]

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